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## Congress Unites to Fight Against Global Pandemics

**Support to Combat Diseases  
Marks Foreign-Aid Shift;  
The 'Currency for Peace'**

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WASHINGTON -- In the confusion of this post-Cold War, terrorist-troubled world, Congress is betting more and more foreign aid dollars on fighting that one common foe everyone can agree upon: infectious disease.

"Medicine can be a currency for peace" says Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, a surgeon and a force behind the change. Today that "currency" is near \$4 billion -- almost triple in real dollars what the U.S. was providing per year in 2001.

That increase parallels -- and is energized by -- efforts by private philanthropists like billionaire Bill Gates, who pledged Friday to triple his contributions to fight tuberculosis. Democrats have almost uniformly backed the shift. More striking has been rising support from Republicans, drawing in both the religious right and old-line fiscal conservatives who long have opposed more traditional development programs.

### Fighting Disease

U.S. spending overseas on health-related programs for 2006, in millions of dollars

HIV AIDS

\$2,480

Family planning; Reproductive health

435

Child survival and maternal health

356

Malaria

273.5

Clean water supply

200

Avian flu prevention

131.5

Tuberculosis

114


Other infectious diseases

Mr. Frist's personal influence is significant, on the White House and his colleagues. The past 12 months have been difficult politically for the Tennessee Republican, but the emphasis on global health care will be a highlight of his legacy when he leaves the Senate at the end of the year.

The AIDS pandemic in Africa, and more recently avian flu, get most of the attention and more than half the dollars. "We are much more aware of these pandemics. They are becoming much more part of our lives," says Rep. Jim Kolbe (R., Ariz.), who is chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee that writes the annual foreign operations bill.

But even as they cut other parts of President Bush's foreign-aid budget, lawmakers went beyond the White House this year in funding the fight against infectious diseases. Counting money passed through the Global

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Fund, based in Geneva, an estimated \$273.5 million would go to fight malaria; \$114 million for tuberculosis. Prodded by Mr. Frist, Congress directed that at least \$200 million from development funds go to projects to improve drinking water in poor countries to guard against infections that kill millions of children each year.

In the 2001 foreign-aid budget, the Congressional Research Service estimates about \$1.28 billion was provided for global health programs. By 2004 that almost doubled to \$2.5 billion, and in fiscal 2006, ending Sept. 30, the House Appropriations Committee estimates the total is \$3.65 billion.

When related items, such as clean-water funding and \$131.5 million to counter the spread of avian flu, are added, \$4 billion is a fair estimate of the total U.S. commitment.

Critics argue most of this growth has gone to fight AIDS and the total assistance is still inadequate, given America's wealth. But the numbers reflect a fundamental change in the direction of the foreign-aid budget, driven by Congress. And the \$4 billion for global health is beginning to rival that old mainstay, military financing grants, which received \$4.5 billion in 2006.

Mr. Frist sees benefits in diplomacy as well as health. "Because it is associated with trust, cutting through politics and government," he explains, public-health spending "establishes a dialogue and a foundation upon which people do communicate."

Fear also is an issue. After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, more Republicans have seen the need to engage with developing countries that might become terrorist havens. "An unstable Africa, because of decimation from HIV-AIDS, does become a breeding ground for terrorism," Mr. Frist says.

Health-care spending also is attractive for many lawmakers because it has measurable results. Mr. Kolbe has pressed the Bush administration to use outcome data to help win support from his congressional colleagues.

"The health sector has the benefit of being a pretty rigorous sector" able to churn out "clear verifiable evidence" of what investments will produce, says Nils Daulaire of the Global Health Council, a nonprofit collection of individuals and organizations focused on better health world-wide. "It's not primarily the humanitarian element," Mr. Daulaire says. "It's the economic rate of return because of the impact on the work force and the greater ability of a population to benefit from education."

Tim Rieser, a Democratic clerk overseeing foreign-aid spending in the Senate Appropriations Committee, agrees. "Part of the emphasis on global health is a reflection of what could win votes here," he says. "You can see real results and it's something tangible that people instinctively understood the United States should do."

Former Rep. Sonny Callahan (R., Ala.), a frequent critic of foreign aid, was won over by the notion of an expanded child survival and health budget. Rep. John Culberson, a Texas Republican and fiscal conservative, champions spending for clean-water projects at the urging of Living Water International, a Stafford, Texas, nonprofit that describes itself as an interdenominational Christian ministry. Sen. Patrick Leahy, (D., Vt.), who helped to shepherd \$15 million this year for "neglected diseases" like intestinal parasites, credits his wife Marcelle's background as a nurse in getting him more interested in health issues.

Mr. Frist's involvement begins with his medical background, including missions to Africa. But he also has family ties to Mr. Gates, **Microsoft** Corp.'s founder. Years ago, the senator's oldest brother, Tommy, sat on the board of the charitable organization United Way with Mr. Gates's late mother, Mary; Tommy Frist still recalls her worrying aloud about her son's future after he dropped out of Harvard.

The Frist-Gates family ties persist. As Sen. Frist uses his office and medical credentials to promote public focus on battling disease, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation estimates it has committed \$6 billion to global health initiatives. The foundation also has promised to increase spending against tuberculosis over the next decade to \$900 million from \$300 million.

"People question if the government can do it all," Sen. Frist says. "To have the private sector step up and lead in targeted areas captures synergies that otherwise wouldn't be there. I think it's critically important. I really applaud him."

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